

Restoring the land: Land tenure, poverty reduction, and ecological restoration

In her doughnut economics analysis, Kate Raworth argued that we must live within the limits of the biosphere in order to survive and thrive. In addition, she identified basic needs beyond which no person should fall: the social foundation to create a safe space for humanity. Her work identifies the interdependence between human wellbeing, land, and planetary wellbeing. Raworth used UN data to point out that about 1/3 of the world's population already fall short of life's basic essentials, like clean water and wastewater treatment, many of them poor, women of colour, and indigenous.

In this module we have introduced land tenure and sovereignty as keys to transition. We have shown how corporate land grabbing and privatizing common lands, the buyout of small holders by large corporate commodity exporters, and urban gentrification pressures erode the capacity of local communities and even nation states to meet the basic needs of their own people. In the next reading from *Common Ground*, the authors encourage public support for indigenous and commons rights struggles and explain why these struggles align, and should matter to us all:

New analysis shows that despite a history of customary use and ownership of over 50 percent of the world's land area, the world's indigenous peoples and local communities—up to 2.5 billion women and men—possess ownership rights to just one-fifth of the land that is rightfully theirs. This catastrophic gap in recognition explains much of the disenfranchisement, poverty, human rights violations and conflict found across the world. Securing those land rights is essential to achieving a just and equitable world.

From health to education, participation to peace, growth to cultural diversity and gender justice, proper recognition of the land rights of indigenous peoples and local communities is fundamental to achieving any truly sustainable development in a habitable climate. (Foreword, page 10)

About 2.5 billion people depend for a means of living on commons, however, only a fifth of all common lands have any legal protection. This means the remaining four-fifths of common land is a prime target for exploitation by resource hungry multi-nationals, their collaborators in government, and international institutions like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. The effects of resource exhaustion, globalization and growth economics, pollution, and indigenous exploitation are a problem for all us.

2.15 Read “Why Indigenous and Community Land Rights Matter for Everyone,” (pp. 14-26) in “Common Ground.” (~11 minutes)

Pearce, Fred. “Common Ground: Securing Land Rights and Safeguarding the Earth. A Global Call to Action on Indigenous and Community Land Rights.” OXFAM report, March 2016.

https://www.oxfamamerica.org/static/media/files/GCA_REPORT_EN_FINAL.pdf

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There is evidence that resistance by indigenous peoples, local communities, commoners and their supporters is gaining ground in the struggle to have full legal ownership of common land recognized. In Canada, naming specifically traditional ancestral lands as Indigenous and community lands, and promoting indigenous sovereignty has a long history of struggle. The history of indigenous peoples in



Figure 2.1 The Aboriginal Idle No More Movement symbol designed by Artist Andy Everson - Creative Commons License. See artist statement at http://www.andyeverson.com/2014/idle_no_more.html (http://www.andyeverson.com/2014/idle_no_more.html)

Canada is, for many, one of removal from traditional lands, forced placement on reserves, broken and failed treaties, residential schools, institutionalized racism, cultural erasure, enduring poverty and social inequality, despite much peaceful and strong protest.

In 2012, Indigenous Canadian sovereignty (and protecting lands and waters) became the foundation of the Idle No More Movement protests initiated by four women activists: Nina Wilson, Sheelah Mclean, Sylvia McAdam, and Jessica Gordon (three Indigenous and one non-Indigenous supporter) in response to the Canadian Government's Bill C-45. A Conservative Party omnibus bill supported by Prime Minister Stephen Harper, C-45 proposed changes in laws that threatened Indigenous land rights, reduced protection for the environment, and placed corporate interests ahead of communities. Support for the Idle No More protests quickly spread across the nation, the Americas, and even globally. See <http://www.idlenomore.ca/>

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The Idle No More Movement received strong support from the Indigenous artist community, many of whom provided powerful images to further movement growth and solidarity. The illustration below, created by Andy Everson, who upholds the traditions of the K'ómoks and Kwakwaka'wakw First Nations, in backing the Idle No More Movement, and its values of strength and spirituality (fist and feather), went viral on social media in support of the movement. As we learned in Module 1, images have power: for changing minds and for invoking activism.